"Plow Deep," This City Man Tells Farmers—and They Listen

By F. D. BENEKE

AMONG the "Editors Who Sway the People," none has fought harder or achieved success more through a strong personality than has Charles P. J. Mooney of the Memphis Commercial Appeal. This tells how he left one of the Hearst Chicago papers and went South to write for farmers and won out.

"SOIL ownership is the salvation of this country. When a man acquires property, even though that property is only a team of mules, he immediately loses any anarchistic ideas he may have possessed previously."

"Establishment of the Federal Farm Land Bank system was the greatest thing for agriculture that has happened in America in the last hundred years. It was a reflection upon our national intelligence that railroads and other big business institutions could borrow all the money they wanted at 3½ per cent on bonds running for 50 years, while our farmers, having the best security on earth, had difficulty in borrowing money at 10 per cent for farm improvements."

"Our entire national life and security is based upon agriculture. We must make rural life more attractive if our country is to endure. Talking machines and kindred inventions which take the city to the farm are of infinite value, because they tend to make farm life more pleasant."

These are only a few of the sound doctrines being preached to Tennesseans, Arkansans, Mississippians, Louisianans, Alabamans, Kentuckians and Missourians within a radius of 300 miles of Memphis, Tenn., by C. P. J. Mooney, editor of the South's largest newspaper, the Memphis Commercial Appeal.

The large and growing circle of readers of that newspaper in the seven states represents the purest strain of Anglo-Saxon blood in America. Mr. Mooney keeps alive through his daily editorial preachments the proud traditions of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Charles Patrick Joseph Mooney is more than the successful editor of a great newspaper. He is distinctly a southern institution.

When Mr. Mooney was a ten-year-old youngster back in Bullitt County, Kentucky, he began to tread the journalistic paths blazed by Dana and Greeley. His beginning was modest in the extreme—as correspondent of the Nelson County Herald, at Bardstown.

It is a long, hard journey from the Nelson County Herald to an editorial chair in New York or Chicago, or even Memphis. But Mr. Mooney made the trip on his own resources and by hard work.

As a boy he was a queer youngster—serious, but possessed always of a deep sense of humor and a dry wit. While his companions were out of nights thinking up new forms of boyish mischief, he stayed indoors by the fireside reading good books. Greek, Latin and mathematics interested him. He followed Napoleon back and forth across Europe to Waterloo, and then on to St. Helena. He sought information ever and eternally, and the things he learned in his boyhood remain fixed in his memory to this good day. His memory is almost uncanny.

In 1890, Mr. Mooney put aside a desire he had to engage in railroad work, and yielded entirely to journalism. Having determined upon his mission, he went to Memphis that year that he might work in a broader field.

Frank Munsey heard of Mr. Mooney in 1902, and sent for him to fill the chair of managing editor of the New York Daily News, now defunct.

AFTER three months in Manhattan, Mr. Mooney went over to William Randolph Hearst, as managing editor of the New York American.

About the time that Chicago was convulsed by a series of big strikes, in 1905, Mr. Mooney was sent West as managing editor of the Chicago Examiner. Through those troubled industrial times and through the panic of 1907, he was in charge of the Examiner.

While Mr. Mooney was in Chicago, an incident occurred that largely changed the agricultural destiny of the country contiguous to the Tennessee metropolis.

Mr. Mooney by chance one day strolled down to the Chicago railroad yards. He leaned against a post to watch the busy jam of freight traffic untangle. On the other side of the post another man leaned. He wore a cap and greasy overalls and jumpers.

"You're a railroad man?" Mr. Mooney asked. The other man nodded.

"Where are all these trains going?" the editor inquired.

"Down South," the railroad man answered, "carrying lard and pork and beans and corn to feed a lot of southerners too lazy to raise that stuff themselves." Mr. Mooney digested this remark while he counted fourteen long trains moving toward the South. He knew that southerners were not lazy, yet the heavy freight trains headed for Dixie offered conclusive proof that something was wrong with the economic system. A real mission of service began to take shape as the vision flashed before him. He went back to Memphis.

Two weeks later the readers of the Memphis Commercial Appeal were astonished to find the leading editorial position filled with black-faced type urging farmers to plow deep, to produce food and feed, and to grow cattle, hogs, sheep and chickens.

The same advice was printed week after week, and month after month.

Apparently none but the new editor took the editorial advice seriously. The readers regarded the editorial preachments as an eccentric idea which Mr. Mooney would abandon when politics warmed up. But they were wrong.

"Feed yourselves first, and then grow cotton," the editor urged.

Slowly, very slowly, as the years dragged along, Mr. Mooney began to gain a little ground. Here and there farmers began to realize the utter folly of growing only cotton in a land where all crops thrive, and sending all they earned to the North for food. A few began to set aside small plots of ground for grains and grasses.

The logic of Mr. Mooney's argument was driven home with smashing force in 1914, when the World War flared up in all its ghastly horror. The South had millions of bales of cotton, but no food and no cash. The cotton market went completely to wreck, and then the South staged the disgraceful buy-a-bale campaign. The South today is terribly ashamed of that ill-advised crusade. Mr. Mooney seized upon his golden opportunity with all the energy at his command. He pounded his theory so hard that other southern newspapers took up the cry, and other forces rallied to the cause. In 1915 southern farmers produced far more food and feed than they had produced in any previous year.

Meanwhile the cotton market had recovered, and those who had diversified began to regret their prudence. They blamed it on Mooney.

The farmers went back to cotton in 1916, but along came the boll weevil and smote them another staggering blow. This time the farmers learned their lesson. But Mr. Mooney refused to console them in the Commercial Appeal. Instead he hammered diversification persistently and consistently.

Apparently Mr. Mooney is winning his fight for a better system of farming in the South, although high priced cotton always tempts the farmers to backslide. Nevertheless, diversification is spreading, and thousands of southern farmers have become converted to the system of producing food and feed for man and beast.

MR. MOONEY plows deep in the city as well as in the country. The Commercial Appeal takes a lively interest in municipal and civic affairs and stands always for law and order.

Seven years ago Mr. Mooney set out to destroy a political machine which he regarded as a menace to the welfare of Memphis. The machine was at the height of its power and popularity when he fired the opening gun through the Commercial Appeal.

Many Memphis business men at that time were for the machine body and soul. The machine winked at prohibition, and the business men then wanted a wide open town. A delegation of advertisers called upon Mr. Mooney to inform him the fight must stop. They received the surprise of their lives. Mr. Mooney gave the delegation a respectful hearing, and then he said:

"Gentlemen, the Commercial Appeal can live if we lose every line of our local advertising. We can make a living from our circulation if we lose every line of our foreign advertising. This fight is going on to the finish."

The Commercial Appeal was too valuable an advertising medium for the merchants to miss. Before the fight was finished, the political machine was utterly destroyed, a judge and a prosecuting attorney were impeached and another judge resigned. Today Memphis is a cleaner city.

Although a Democratic newspaper, the Commercial Appeal is the first to lambaste Democratic office holders who fail to measure up to Mr. Mooney's standard of democracy.

"Folks like to see their names in print," Mr. Mooney often tells his reporters. "Get the news and print the names. And don't overlook the pictures."

Every day Mr. Mooney roams around the streets of Memphis, meeting the people and learning what they are thinking about. He knows thousands by name, laborers as well as bankers. Everyone knows him.

During the war the Commercial Appeal each Sunday morning carried an editorial summary which Mr. Mooney called "The Week in the War." In this review he analyzed the military events of the week. He displayed marvelous genius in this direction, and made clear many events in the daily news that were not clear to the layman.

Mr. Mooney served as a member of the West Tennessee Board of Exemption Appeals. He believed in putting young men into the army, unless they had a gilt-edged claim for exemption. Possibly this was due solely to patriotic motives, or possibly to the vision of his own youngster, 19 years old, who volunteered and was in the thick of the fighting in France. Gen. Crowder declared that the West Tennessee Board more perfectly interpreted the complex draft regulations than any other board in the United States.

Mr. Mooney stands for all that is best in good government and good citizenship. His Americanism is 100 per cent. He has been a mighty force in the upbuilding of his city, his state, and the South. But when he shall have written "thirty" the good he has done for southern agriculture will stand out boldly as the crowning achievement of his busy life.

He returned to the South at a time when the mortgage bankers had Dixie under their heels. He has lived to see this condition reversed. And he played a large part in bringing it about.

CHARLES P. J. MOONEY

He became a famous editor of a city paper and wielded a wide influence because he wrote hard sense for farmers.